



Saskatchewan
Agriculture
and Food

Farm & Food Report

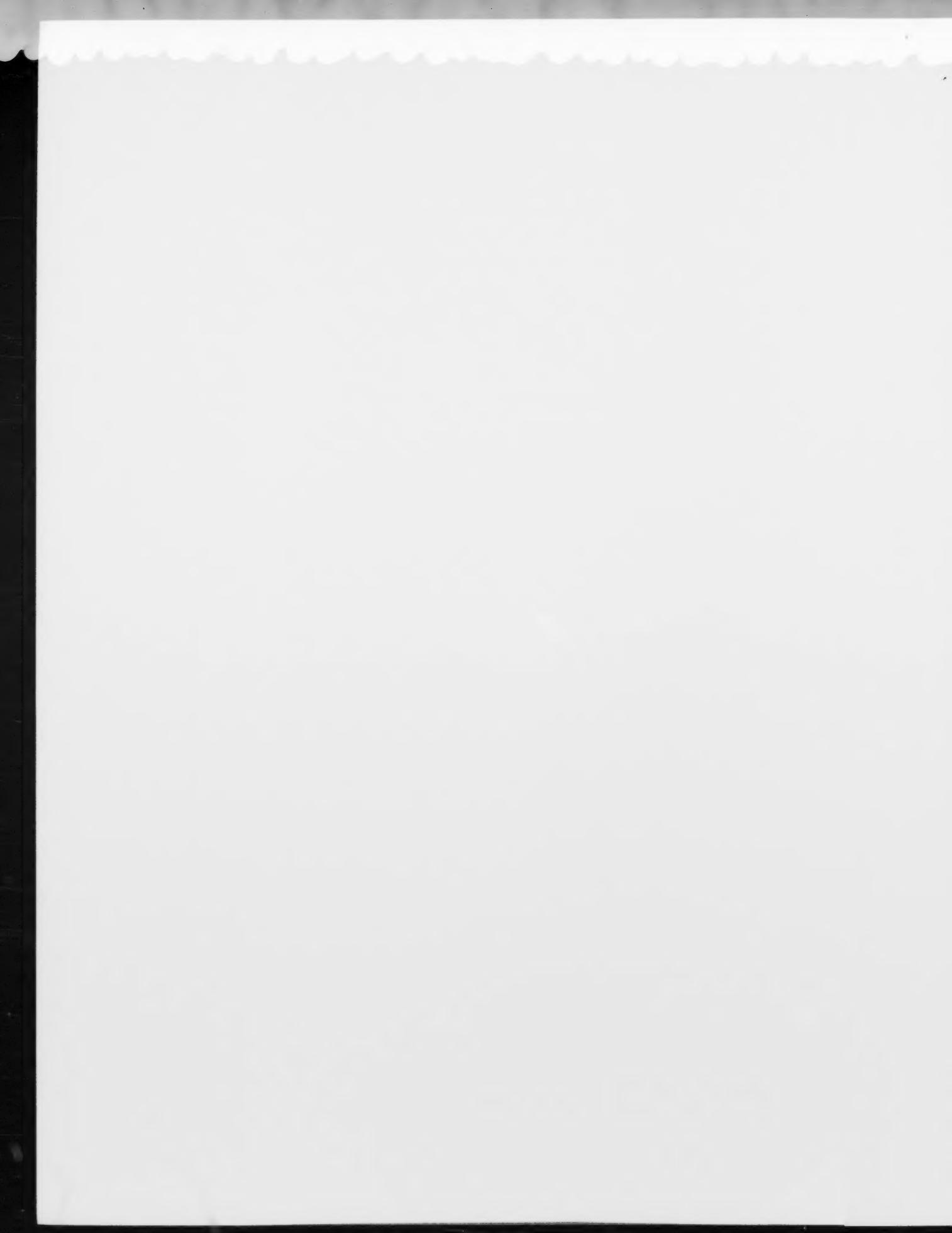
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INDEX

ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM TEACHES THE BUSINESS OF FARMING.....	07-41-193
FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT, ACCORDING TO BIOVENTURE CHALLENGE	07-41-194
ANCIENT "WONDER BERRY" TAKING ROOT IN SASKATCHEWAN.....	07-41-195
FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN MARKETING CATTLE.....	07-41-196
KEEP YOUR CANOLA COOL THIS FALL	07-41-197

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Week of October 8, 2007

ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM TEACHES THE BUSINESS OF FARMING

For producers who spend a lot of time working *at* their businesses rather than *on* their businesses, the University of Saskatchewan is offering a program that will help them to learn how to switch hats.

The Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program (AEP) is a week-long, intensive school open to producers of all kinds who want to learn about farm management, including how to successfully manage change, capital and risk. The 2008 session will mark the 10th anniversary of the program.

Program Co-ordinator Pat Englund says the initiative addresses a wide variety of agribusiness issues and questions, including content suggested by producers.

"The content is largely based on business planning, financial planning, marketing, finance and accounting, and different farm management issues," Englund said. "There's an Aboriginal dimension, too, as well as an agribusiness simulation where participants break into groups and make decisions based on a devised situation."

This year's program will also include sessions on two very popular topics – personal financial planning and farm succession planning.

With the AEP, you never know who your classmates might be. Englund says a diverse collection of participants make up the program each year.

"It really appeals to a wide variety of people – first and foremost, producers. We've had them from all three Prairie provinces," she noted. "Last year, we saw some people from the Canadian Wheat Board, Ducks Unlimited and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, as well as Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. We also saw people from credit unions and banks, as well as agribusiness consultants, lenders, entrepreneurs, economic development professionals, venture capitalists and manufacturers."

The AEP features four instructors from the professorial staff at the University of Saskatchewan. Two professors from the College of Agriculture and Bioresources and two from the Edwards School of Business will each teach portions of the program.

The 2008 AEP session has room for approximately 40 participants. It runs from January 20 to 26 in Saskatoon. More information will soon be posted on the program's website at <http://agribusiness.usask.ca>.

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Tuition for the program is \$1,250 for producers and \$1,500 for non-producers. However, producers interested in attending can apply for sponsorship funding through a program offered by the Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan (ACS), formally the Saskatchewan Council for Community Development.

"There's an application form on our website, at www.agcouncil.ca," said Bev Magill, a project officer with ACS. "We like to pick a variety of folks with different experiences, coming from different backgrounds, producing different crops, or maybe they're doing something different on their farm altogether."

The ACS sponsorship is \$1,000 and can be used toward tuition, travel, accommodations or any other expenses that producers taking the AEP may incur.

If you are interested in applying for sponsorship, Magill says completed applications must reach her office by January 14, 2008. Those who are already receiving funding from the Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS) to take the program will not be eligible for ACS sponsorship.

- 30 -

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Saskatchewan

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FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT, ACCORDING TO BIOVENTURE CHALLENGE

“The young people are our future.” It’s an often stated, but undisputable, axiom – and it’s why a new initiative administered by the Industry Liaison Office (ILO) at the University of Saskatchewan has proven to be so heartening for the province.

The winners of the first-ever BioVenture Business Plan Challenge are Rachel and Chris Buhler, a brother and sister team from Osler, just north of Saskatoon. Their company, Floating Gardens Ltd., will now receive a \$50,000 award to help make their business proposal a reality.

“The Buhlers are trying to take advantage of a very interesting synergy between fish farming and hydroponic growing of vegetables,” stated Doug Gill, Managing Director of the ILO. “They’ve done a lot of work to identify what the markets are and what the challenges are. I think that the team is a very worthy winner.”

The BioVenture Challenge is a joint initiative of the U of S ILO and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food to help promote, develop and accelerate the bio-economy within Saskatchewan. It encourages young people to use their talents to build companies in Saskatchewan and, ultimately, to stay in Saskatchewan. It’s a strategy to enhance the province’s economic base, but also to help demonstrate that young people don’t have to leave the province to find good business opportunities.

Gill says this year’s field proved the tremendous amount of entrepreneurial talent we have in Saskatchewan.

“All five of the finalists displayed the ability to be creative and innovative with regards to their business proposals. The entrepreneurs involved in writing these proposals showed a great deal of energy and enthusiasm, and a willingness to learn and develop an extensive network of contacts and support systems,” he noted.

“I think this challenge is very encouraging for the future of the province.”

By all measures, Gill says the first BioVenture Challenge was a resounding success. “We received a really great response. There were probably in the order of 10 applicants for this award, and that, in itself, shows that there is an audience out there,” he noted.

“There are young entrepreneurs who are interested in pursuing their business dreams in Saskatchewan.

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The quality of the five finalists demonstrates that. I think they are all winners in this initiative, especially when you look at the training, knowledge and experience that they received in preparing their business plans, writing their proposals and making their presentations to the judging panel. It was a great learning experience for them."

The BioVenture Challenge was funded under the Strategic Research Program agreement between SAF and the U of S. Given the level of enthusiasm for the inaugural BioVenture Challenge, Gill is optimistic that the competition will continue in the future.

More information can also be found on the ILO website at www.usask.ca/research/ilo.

- 30 -

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Saskatchewan

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ANCIENT "WONDER BERRY" TAKING ROOT IN SASKATCHEWAN

An ancient and exotic cure-all plant is being rediscovered across North America, and the Saskatchewan company Northern Vigor Berries is at the heart of its resurgence.

Seabuckthorn bushes, which some Saskatchewan producers have been using as shelterbelt plants for years, also yield bark, leaves and fruit that are packed full of things that are good for us: omega fatty acids 3, 6, and 9 are found in the seeds, and the fruit is rich in vitamins A, C, E, K, B1, B2 and Niacinamide.

Betty Forbes, President and CEO of Northern Vigor Berries, grows and markets seabuckthorn bushes and their products. She says the plant has some legendary admirers.

"Ghengis Khan is said to have fed seabuckthorn to troops and horses prior to battle to keep them healthy, in battle and afterwards," said Forbes. "It's been traditionally used in many forms throughout China for centuries."

Forbes, herself, is still getting acquainted with the myriad of uses for seabuckthorn bushes and berries.

"Medicinally, it has uses as a soothing oil for cuts or burns," she said. "It's one of the fruits that has a perfect one-to-one ratio between omega-3 and omega-6. Of all the fruits, it has the highest content of Vitamin E. It is very high in Vitamin C. In fact, there's a company out of Finland that's marketing capsules just on the Vitamin C alone."

Forbes noted that the berries, leaves and even the tree bark have been studied for a wide range of potential health benefits. She says it's impossible to narrow its benefits down to just one or two specific uses.

"It's really hard to say 'this is what it's good for,' because the list is pages and pages long."

Forbes' father and brother have a 15-acre seabuckthorn orchard, which she estimates is probably the largest in Canada at present. She stepped into the business full-time when no one else expressed a desire to market the relatively unknown plant.

"One of the problems they (her family) experienced was when promised markets for the berries fell through, so I stepped up and said we need to do something for ourselves rather than to wait for

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somebody else to do it for us," she stated. "Although we get a lot of consultative help, we needed to take the reins, move forward, and develop some products in addition to just the berry line."

On top of the health benefits, seabuckthorn actually makes a pretty tasty pie, juice, or even a liqueur.

"Its taste is between an orange and a lemon," Forbes said. "It's not everybody's flavour choice, but mixed in with various other things, it's awesome. The Chinese used it as their sports drink during the Seoul Olympics."

As far as markets go, Forbes says Canada is now in the process of learning where seabuckthorn is needed, at home and around the world. Currently, foreign markets like Japan, Russia and China are the strongest, but she believes interest is growing in Canada and the United States.

According to Forbes, Saskatchewan has a distinct advantage when it comes to growing seabuckthorn bushes. The plant is very winter- and drought-tolerant, and it grows well in high pH soil. It even tolerates saline soil.

"Our climate is perfect for seabuckthorn. We've got a very good growing climate and soil. It doesn't do as well in clay soil, but in most of the countryside, it does wonderfully."

For those interested in learning more about seabuckthorn bushes and products, Forbes recommends typing "seabuckthorn" into your Internet search engine and enjoy the reading.

- 30 -

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Saskatchewan

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FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN MARKETING CATTLE

Well-defined marketing strategies are an essential component of any successful business, and cattle production is no different.

A marketing plan that outlines where, when, how, and to whom an enterprise will market its product is a requirement for any successful operation. Due to other demands, many beef producers keep this information in the back of their heads and seldom review it. Then, when the busy fall season approaches, the anxiety level increases as decisions need to be made that impact the financial status of the business for the coming year.

Beef economist Sandy Russell with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) says that, with significant movement from week to week in feeder cattle prices, it takes an in-depth understanding of the factors driving the current rate in order to determine the optimal strategy for any given cattle operation.

"Whatever market you are targeting, planning and analysis needs to be completed before finalizing any decision to sell," she stated.

Without a marketing plan, Russell believes that managers often end up making decisions based on industry averages or what has been done in the past, rather than what may be most profitable for their businesses at the time.

"No two beef operations are the same," she noted. "The advantages and disadvantages that any business has are often unique to that enterprise. Following the price trend alone will not necessarily be the most favourable decision for your business."

In order for producers to make appropriate marketing decisions, Russell says they should first conduct a financial analysis of their businesses. Specifically, farmers need to be aware of their cost to produce their product, as well as their yearly cash flow requirements. Once this is determined, a comparison of various marketing alternatives can be made and applied to the business.

"This is the only way to truly identify the most profitable marketing strategy for your calves," Russell said.

Managers must also consider the quality of their product and where that product best fits in the marketplace. Information on market trends, break-evens and projections needs to be collected and

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continuously examined to keep on top of changes in the marketplace. This includes monitoring the local cash market as well as various futures markets to project the potential value of cattle and the impact that other factors, such as the Canadian dollar or the price of corn, may have on feeder markets.

According to Russell, cattle producers stand the best chance of maximizing their marketing opportunities by remembering a few key points.

First, utilize all market information resources available. "The more market intelligence you can utilize to help make your marketing decisions, the better," she noted.

Second, know your break-even price and have a marketing plan developed well in advance. This plan needs to be flexible as markets change, but it is important to have the initial strategy in place.

Third, remember that markets are built upon relationships. According to Russell, "it is important to build relationships with various participants in the marketplace, both to access information and to create opportunities to market cattle."

Fourth, be aware of various pricing methods and delivery alternatives. "Producers should understand what types of cattle do best under which pricing methods, and what alternatives work best for their businesses," she stated.

Fifth, have a comprehensive understanding of the entire industry, and identify what drives market price. "It is important to be aware of what is taking place around you in combination with what is influencing the marketplace," Russell said.

"Successful marketers do not isolate themselves from the industry or the marketplace. They are constantly watching and anticipating the market prices."

- 30 -

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KEEP YOUR CANOLA COOL THIS FALL

A decent harvest and record production will see a lot of canola in the bin this year. However, the Canola Council of Canada is advising growers to make sure they condition their canola to storage-safe temperature and moisture levels this fall, or their hard work could all be for naught.

Canola Council agronomy specialist David Vanthuyne says the variable weather conditions during the harvest season should make growers very cautious as they store their canola.

Vanthuyne explains that conditioning involves moving air through the grain mass to prevent any spoilage that may result from moisture migration and seed respiration. He stresses that canola harvested at much above eight- to nine-per-cent moisture must be conditioned, especially if grain temperature is above 25 degrees Celsius.

"Aeration and/or 'turning' the canola can be an effective way to avoid spoilage," Vanthuyne said. The objective is to cool the seed to below 15 degrees Celsius, and to lower its moisture content to eight per cent moisture – but "if moisture levels are above 10 to 12 per cent, growers need to consider heated air drying," he added.

Growers must regularly monitor their bins for heating or mould growth. Because farmers are using bigger and bigger bins, more heat can be generated and trapped in the bin.

Recent cooler temperatures may give growers a little more time to condition canola, but growers must not assume they are home free, "even if the stored canola is already down below 15 degrees Celsius," Vanthuyne noted. Pockets of damp seed or green dockage can still create hot spots that can quickly spoil a bin.

Even dry canola can still be at risk if it has a high temperature, especially if parts of the bin contain green material which can potentially start the spoiling process.

As a result, Vanthuyne says it is important for producers with stored canola to keep a close eye on their bins even after the seed has been conditioned. Freshly harvested canola can maintain a high respiration rate for up to six weeks before becoming dormant. Over time, the seed may become mouldy or heat-damaged, and, in severe cases, it can ignite.

So, even though the crush of harvest may be nearing the home stretch, producers with crop in the bin are

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reminded to keep their eyes open for any sign of trouble in there. "Monitoring is a best practice, just like keeping malathion far away from stored canola," Vanthuyne stated.

More information and advice on the safe storage of canola can be found on the following web pages:

- <http://www.canola-council.org/safestorage.aspx>
- [http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/crop1301](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/crop1301)
- <http://www.canola-council.org/MalathionAug11.html>

- 30 -

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